

# ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

## Equity is Not Just Another Cliché

By Dr. Deb Kerr, Superintendent - School District of Brown Deer

**The School District of Brown Deer** is proud to be one of the most diverse school districts in the state of Wisconsin. Families move to Brown Deer to be an integral part of a vibrant community that accepts people for who they are, celebrates diverse perspectives, and come together to thrive as an All-America City.

Two weeks ago, at a high school conference football game, it happened again, the marginalization of our Brown Deer students while competing in an athletic contest sanctioned by the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletics Association (WIAA). White football players from another school used the “N” word directed at our quarterback and other students of color. The white referees were non-responsive and complacent. The coaches and athletic directors from both schools have investigated the matter and weighed in with no final resolution.

The administration from the opposing team has apologized and so has the coach; however, they did not commit the racial slur. In fact, last season, this very situation occurred with the same white privileged players as they competed against a racially diverse football team. Why has there been no resolution, no apologies from the perpetrators, no lessons learned?

The adults who are responsible for ensuring the safety of “ALL” children can no longer turn a blind eye or sweep under the rug the continuous acts of blatant racism that are going on right before our very eyes.

How long should students of color be expected to carry this weight of trauma? Interestingly enough, the students who continue to be exposed to these behaviors have never been students with allegations of being the perpetrators. Acts of verbal or physical aggression are unacceptable, inappropriate and should not

be tolerated by anyone. Had the tables been turned, the outcome would have been different. It is important for privileged individuals to understand the negative power of a word they will never be subjected to because “white privilege” allows them to navigate a society where they never have to prove their worth, where they are never second-guessed, where they do not have to work twice as hard to be considered just as good and where good is never good enough.

As the proud Superintendent of Brown Deer, I am speaking my truth and I encourage you to read, reflect, and be willing to act. My Brown Deer scholar-athletes are speaking their truth. They did not imagine any of this and have been subjected to racial slurs (even our white kids) repeatedly by their suburban rivals. Enough is enough. I can reveal numer-

ous situations where our Brown Deer students have been marginalized because of the color of their skin. These situations have occurred during both girl’s and boy’s athletic contests, on the basketball court, during soccer matches, and even when I chaperoned a student group to a sectional basketball game. Also, I am very aware of our neighbor Milwaukee Public School District as their students have also experienced per-



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sistent marginalization across the suburbs and the state. Unfortunately, these situations keep happening over and over again. It is now time to hold school districts accountable for the actions of their students and the school community. It is extremely important for all of us to become allies in this work so that “ALL” of our students feel loved and supported. If we are silent, then we are complicit with endorsing these kinds of behaviors. Who will advocate on behalf of “ALL” children? We will, TOGETHER!

## OUR CALL TO ACTION

We all need to responsibly create the necessary conditions to eliminate the persistent inequities and marginalization of our students on the athletic field and in our classrooms:

**1 Acknowledge the egregious behavior**, take ownership immediately, offer a sincere apology, and apply developmentally appropriate education. This applies to both students and adults.

**2 Eliminate placing the responsibility on students of color** to “just deal with” acts of racism. This is an issue that needs to be addressed by adults.

**3 Teach our young people that racism is never acceptable** at any place at any time. Create opportunities to engage students in diverse learning environments or situations that will help them understand the value of different perspectives and better understand different cultures.

**4 Develop school board equity policies** that explicitly state non-negotiables for conduct and much-needed values of character in our schools.

**5 Engage our parents** in learning to understand what diversity and closing achievement gaps is all about. It’s a fact that every school district in our state has an achievement gap. Identifying the support that our students need is mission-critical.

**6 Advocate for changes with our state and local organizations** such as the WIAA to provide expectations for high ethical standards of conduct surrounding equity. For example, concise language in all school’s athletic code handbook/manuals that speaks to the protocol that would be implemented by all. This would also be similar to the new rule instituted by the WIAA about athletes who have committed a felony even though they haven’t been found guilty in a court of law, yet they are suspended until they have completed the judicial process.

**7 Learn from other diverse school communities** on how they collectively engage in discussions about race, marginalization, and inequities.

Anyone making any type of derogatory remarks and/or racial slurs to any human being is immoral. We all need to be part of the solution and willing to engage in further actions that eliminate these disparities. As of today, administrative personnel from the athletic conference have discussed this matter in great depth. The outcome is that we all need to work together to be part of the solution. The School District of Brown Deer is set to host a meeting in the near future with all Woodland conference superintendents, principals, and athletic directors to address the proposed call to action.

In Brown Deer, we are not afraid to speak our truth and neither should any of you. I am very proud of the way my students, families, and staff have handled themselves by taking the high road. Enough is enough. Acceptance and respect are values that should unite us not divide us. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, “I have decided to stick with love as hate is too great a burden to bear.” We should all choose love to empower education for all of our young people. Leaders who value equity and act on diversity and inclusion and who encourage divergent ways of thinking are the ones who will change the face of education forever. We can and will go far TOGETHER!



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